

Sabina Schaffner

## The impact of language policy issues on program development and management at the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich Language Center

**Abstract:** This article explores the impact of language policy issues on program development and management at the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich Language Center. Based on the analysis of the language policy approach of the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich, the article reflects both current practices and policy elements with the help of the categories offered by François Grin (2010). Part of the data collected was also considered in 2011 while answering a questionnaire on Language Policy in Higher Education in Switzerland. The Swiss Institute of Multilingualism, in charge of gathering the data for Switzerland for the pan-European project Language Rich Europe, managed by the British Council and co-financed by the European Commission (British Council/European Commission 2010–2013), had approached our Language Center in this matter.<sup>1</sup> In a wider context, the present survey is a case study reflecting the situation of two major Swiss Universities outside the European Union.<sup>2</sup>

The article shows that both the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich lack a consistent language policy document at institutional level, while showing a cautious approach to questions of future language governance. It argues that the impact of this approach leads to the constant readjustment of the strategic goals of program development by the Language Center's director through regular needs analysis interviews with the stakeholders in the departments and faculties, and to a continuous fine-tuning of pedagogical formats by the heads of units.

A further qualitative study will be carried out in 2012 through focus group interviews with different stakeholder groups, e.g. deans, program directors, students and representatives of (doctoral) students' unions, in order to collect more specific data as a basis for more detailed analysis and interpretation.

---

1 The project was initiated in 2010 by the British Council and aims to develop an index in order to compare the language environment in 20 European countries. The index will capture the following aspects: (foreign) language teaching, languages in the workplace, in the media and in public spaces as well as language policy. Several language types will be analysed: official state language(s), foreign languages, regional minority languages and immigrant minority languages (<http://languagerichblog.eu/>).

2 For case studies referring to the European Union, see e.g. Gâz 2011.

**Keywords:** language policy, program development, internationalisation, languages of instruction, accreditation

---

**Sabina Schaffner:** University of Zurich and ETH Zurich.  
E-mail: sabina.schaffner@sprachen.uzh.ch

## 1 Introduction: The language policy discussion at the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich

The mission statements and strategic plans of both universities show commitment to student mobility and internationalisation as well as a fostering of the plurilingualism and employability of their future graduates. However, this strategic positioning offers only preliminary implications regarding the program development for the joint Language Center. In order to foster a more strategic positioning, the Executive Boards of both institutions were asked in 2009 to decide on the necessity of implementing a language policy at university level. This was a consequence of the external multi-level quality evaluation process of the Language Center run by the Zurich University Evaluation Office.

## 2 National and international discourse on language policy (in academia)

### 2.1 The current debate on multilingualism in Switzerland: intercomprehension does not always work

The Language Policy of the Swiss Confederation is described in the Federal Act on National Languages and Understanding between the Linguistic Communities;<sup>3</sup> it embraces, for example, among other measures, a quota system for the federal administration, a plurilingual profile of at least three national languages for administrative staff, fostering of exchange programs in secondary education, support for multilingual cantons, the creation of a National Center for Multilingualism and the extension of translation services.

---

3 5. 6. 2010; <http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/ff/2007/6951.pdf>

Whereas one can observe a functioning plurilingual practice in Parliament, linguistic practices show that intercomprehension is not always obvious as shown in the saying “Les Suisses s’entendent parce qu’ils ne se comprennent pas” [“The Swiss get along well because they don’t understand one another”; my translation]. Language skills in French have become an issue in the current election campaign of future members of the Swiss Federal Council from the German-speaking part of Switzerland, and there has even been a proposition by a French-speaking member of the National Council to replace standard German by Swiss German as a *lingua franca* of internal communication.

A number of studies on plurilingual practices in Switzerland have been carried out lately, such as the multi-level project “Language Diversity and Language Competence in Switzerland”<sup>4</sup> or the international Dylan project, “Language dynamics and management of diversity”,<sup>5</sup> which give some insight into the functioning of linguistic practices in companies, management, EU institutions and educational systems.

## 2.2 Languages in academia – an increasingly important issue

Within the context of globalisation, language in academia has also become a mainstream topic at European conferences – in Geneva, Bern, Brussels, Luxembourg, Freiburg and Helsinki in 2010 alone. The main focus of these conferences is research on linguistic practices examined from the perspective of applied linguistics or pedagogy. Only recently have governance aspects become a topic of research undertaken by researchers such as François Grin, whose goal is to study and conceptualise the economic, social and political impacts of linguistic practices at universities and to describe the challenges resulting from these questions (Grin 2010).

## 3 Procedures for the analysis of Language Policy elements

In his presentation “Managing languages in academia: Pointers from education economics and language economics”, François Grin offers a matrix for the

---

4 <http://www.nfp56.ch/d.cfm?Slanguage=d>

5 [http://www.dylan-project.org/Dylan\\_en/home/home.php](http://www.dylan-project.org/Dylan_en/home/home.php)

analysis of language policy challenges which combines the organisational perspective with the languages and types of activities on one hand, and the levels of action on the other, as follows (Grin 2010: 9–10):

**A: Organisational perspective**

- Macro level: university, faculty
- Medium level: faculty or program, linguistic practice of an institute, . . .
- Micro level: study unit (seminar, lecture)

**B: Languages and types of activities**

- Languages taught as subjects
- Language(s) of instruction
- Language(s) used in research
- Language(s) of administration
- Language(s) of external communication

**C: Levels of actions**

- General policy
- Organisational questions
- Pedagogy

I have adapted the categories of Grin's matrix to the reality of the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich (Table 1) in order to use it as a framework for the upcoming policy evaluation of language policy issues of the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich.

In my surveys I concentrated on the categories “languages as subjects” and “languages of instruction”, which are most directly linked to the Language Center's mission and services and which were brought up in the evaluation process. The results of my research comprising, for example, suggestions on the level of governance, were presented to the Executive Boards of the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich in March 2010. The presentation included an overview of language policy in higher education within the European context, an overview of the existing language policy regulations of the institutions involved at macro and micro level, the impact of language policy on program development, as well as feedback and suggestions concerning future language policy development. Both boards formulated their reaction to the Language Center's input, and did so to meet the measures proposed by the Evaluation Office, namely to check the necessity of developing a language policy at institutional level.

Table 1: Linguistic practices in academia (based on Grin 2010)

Subjects	Instruction	Research	Administration	External Communication
<b>GP:</b> What languages, up to what level, for whom – and for what reasons?	<b>GP:</b> Should foreign languages be used? In which programs? Why?	<b>GP:</b> Should foreign languages be used? For which research activities? Why?	<b>GP:</b> Any reasons to use foreign languages in administration?	<b>GP:</b> Institutional image aimed at; targeted student profile and recruitment
<b>O:</b> What budget implications?	<b>O:</b> What need for associated services for students and teaching staff (e.g. language center)?	<b>O:</b> What need for associated services for students and teaching and research staff (e.g. language center)?	<b>O:</b> What implications for internal by-laws? What need for support for admin staff?	<b>O:</b> Setting up of language quality assurance
<b>P:</b> How best to impart the skills aimed at?	<b>P:</b> What impact on ways of teaching?	<b>P:</b> Implications for training of PhD students?	<b>P:</b> Specific issues concerning admin staff?	<b>P:</b> Specific issues concerning international affairs officers

GP = general policy; O = organisational questions; P = pedagogy

## 4 Language policy at the University of Zurich

The Mission Statement of International Relations of the University of Zurich ratified by the Executive Board of the University on 2 March 2006<sup>6</sup> contains the following language policy elements:

### 2. Mobility and the internationalisation of teaching

The University of Zurich fosters the integration of the international and particularly the European dimension in all degree programmes. . . .

So-called mobility windows have been set up to boost mobility in all degree programmes and at all levels – Bachelor’s, Master’s, Doctoral. . . .

6 [http://www.int.uzh.ch/international/mission\\_en.html](http://www.int.uzh.ch/international/mission_en.html)

To encourage internationalisation at student level, programmes for international students and summer schools will be developed and German language courses provided.

## 7. Language

Multilingual Switzerland lies at the very heart of Europe. The University of Zurich's identity as a German-speaking university is to be cultivated especially at Bachelor degree level. Degree programmes are being promoted in English at the Master's and Doctoral level.

As for the internationalisation of teaching, the third statement is linked to concrete measures since the Language Center regularly offers German courses. The first and the second statements are partly linked with concrete measures, but none of the statements is consistently linked to strategic goal setting.

As far as the commitment to internationalisation is concerned, we can observe that in the autumn semester 2009 there were 4,370 foreign students, and within this group 1,991 German students, enrolled at the University of Zurich out of a total of 25,852 students. The majority of foreign students follow a program in the Faculties of Science, Law, and Economics. In the same semester, there were only 181 outgoing mobility students, and 158 incoming mobility students at the University of Zurich. The University of Zurich is a partner in a range of exchange programs such as Erasmus and ISEP (International Student Exchange Programs). Moreover, the University of Zurich has concluded bilateral university-wide agreements and faculty-wide agreements with several universities worldwide. Students of these partner universities are entitled to apply for an exchange semester or year at the University of Zurich.<sup>7</sup> In a survey carried out by the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities in 2008/09 on the implementation of the Bologna Reform, the relatively low degree of mobility was evaluated, showing that international mobility was more important than mobility within Switzerland.<sup>8</sup> As for the outgoing students, a preference for universities in Germany, France, Italy, England and the US could be observed (CRUS 2008/09: 31–38).

Though there is no coherent language policy document at university level for the language(s) of instruction, Chapter 7 of the Mission Statement on Internationalisation gives some general guidelines. More specific information on this issue is integrated into the regulations at the level of specific programs; decisions concerning the language of instruction seem to be linked with the academic culture of the discipline concerned, the degree of internationalisation on the part of

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://int.uzh.ch/out/program.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.crus.ch/die-crus/koordiniert-harmonisiert/projekt-bologna-ects.html?L=0>

teaching staff and the existence of joint degree Master's programs. The current language of instruction in Bachelor's programs is German. It is also the language of tuition in Master's programs of the Faculties of Theology, the Medical Faculty, the Faculty of Veterinary Science and the Faculty of Arts, except for the foreign language departments (philological chairs), where the language of instruction may be the target language. In the Faculty of Science, the Economics Faculty and the Faculty of Law languages of instruction are German, or both German and English, whereas only a few programs are taught exclusively in English. Interestingly enough, the mission statement on internationalisation does not contain any statements focussing on Swiss students and outgoing mobility. One can find some hints regarding the fostering of plurilingual competence in the Guidelines on the Implementation of the Bologna Process at Zurich University of 1 March 2004:

*§12 Foreign languages and transferable competences (soft skills)*

In every program and at every study level a maximum of 15 ECTS can be awarded for the acquisition of specific language skills or other transferable skills (soft skills) [my translation].<sup>9</sup>

This paragraph defines the range of possible credits which can be awarded within Bachelor's or Master's programs for languages within elective, or compulsory elective, subjects. There was, however, at that time neither a structural framework nor a strategy at university level to define languages as an integral and compulsory part of all study programs.

In 2007, the Executive Board specified the impact of language education, with regard to reaching the University of Zurich's strategic goals, as follows:

*Principles of the Executive Board* (Decision by the Executive Board of 20 September 2007)

**Languages on offer in Bachelor's and Master's programs**

- a. The courses in modern languages of the Language Center are an important additional offer for students of the University of Zurich, supporting the institution in reaching its strategic goals (internationalisation, employability/competitiveness, English as the lingua franca of research . . .)
- b. In the Academic Record students receive on completion of their studies ECTS points awarded for core courses should be distinguished from ECTS points credited for optional or elective courses [my translation].

---

9 <http://www.sae.uzh.ch/dokumente/ARichtlinieUZH>

A subsequent survey carried out by the Language Center in autumn 2009 shows that all faculties, with the exception of the Economics Faculty, award credits for language performance in optional courses at Bachelor's and Master's level. Apart from differences existing between specific programs, the overview shows that the most credits are awarded in the programs of the Faculty of Science and to a lesser extent in the Economics Faculty.

The number of credits awarded for languages in the Theological Faculty and the Faculty of Arts corresponds more or less to the suggestions defined in the Guidelines on the Implementation of the Bologna Process at the University of Zurich in 2004. For structural reasons, the Medical Faculty, the Faculty of Veterinary Science and the Faculty of Law have fewer opportunities to award credits for language performance.

**Table 2:** Accreditation of language policy performance at the University of Zurich

	<b>Bachelor's level Optional courses</b>	<b>Bachelor's level Compulsory elective courses</b>	<b>Master's level Optional courses</b>	<b>Master's level Elective courses</b>
<b>Theological Faculty</b>	14		20	
<b>Faculty of Arts</b>	studium generale HF 9–15; NF 3–6	Comparative Literature, History of Art	studium generale HF 7.5–10.5; NF1.5–3	
<b>Faculty of Science</b>	20–45 no restriction		4–24 no restriction	
<b>Faculty of Law</b>	6		6–12	
<b>Faculty of Economics</b>	2			
<b>Medical Faculty</b>			2 × 2	4
<b>Vetsuisse Faculty</b>			2	

After presenting the results of the analysis of the documents containing language policy elements and regulations, which can be seen as an implicit language policy element at medium level according to Grin's matrix, to the Executive Board on 11 March 2010, the Language Center's director made the following suggestions regarding future language policy development:

A language policy at the University of Zurich should at least contain statements on the following issues:



- the use of national languages in teaching, publications and on a corporate identity level
- the consequences of internationalisation on the language(s) of instruction concerning the linguistic and cultural preparation of students and teaching staff
- mobility concerning the fostering of language skills of both incoming and outgoing students and the recognition of credits acquired for language performance
- the fostering of individual multilingualism by crediting language performance (integration of the Resolution of the Executive Board of 20 September 2007)
- the promotion of accreditation of language performance in the field of optional courses (transferable skills) and elective courses (contribution to study skills)

**Table 3:** Suggested Language Policy elements to be developed at the University of Zurich

Subjects	Instruction	Research	Administration	External Communication
<b>GP:</b> What languages, up to what level, for whom – and for what reasons?	<b>GP:</b> Should foreign languages be used? In which programs? Why?	<b>GP:</b> Should foreign languages be used? For which research activities? Why?	<b>GP:</b> Any reasons to use foreign languages in administration?	<b>GP:</b> Institutional image aimed at; targeted student profile and recruitment
<b>O:</b> What budget implications?	<b>O:</b> What need for associated services for students and teaching staff (e.g. language center)?	<b>O:</b> What need for associated services for students and teaching and research staff (e.g. language center)?	<b>O:</b> What implications for internal by-laws? What need for support for admin staff?	<b>O:</b> Setting up of language quality assurance
<b>P:</b> How best to impart the skills aimed at?	<b>P:</b> What impact on ways of teaching?	<b>P:</b> Implications for training of PhD students?	<b>P:</b> Specific issues concerning admin staff?	<b>P:</b> Specific issues concerning international affairs officers

GP = general policy; O = organisational questions; P = pedagogy

In the Language Center director's view, a language policy document should embrace statements at all levels and cover all the categories mentioned above. The concentration on the categories "languages as subjects" and "languages of

instruction” was motivated by their close link to the Language Center’s mission and services. Only the first suggestion introduces an element focussing on other categories (“research” and “external communication”) in order to complete the picture.

The Executive Board decided that there was no need for a language policy document, nor for the adoption of principles at university level. It was argued, moreover, that the accreditation of language performance was regulated by the faculties’ policies concerning language. Members of the Executive Board agreed, however, that the awareness of the impact of language competence among the stakeholders and decision makers at faculty and university levels must be improved. In this context, the Language Center was called upon to analyze the input from the faculties and discuss it with the Center’s Board. The Executive Board stressed the importance of German as the language of instruction and English as the language of the research community. There was agreement that the promotion of a broad language offer mirroring requirements in the fields of study skills, research networks and to some extent students’ social needs should be guaranteed.

From the perspective of governance, the Executive Board’s position on a macro level is very cautious. As for further policy discussion, the Language Center’s management was called upon to take up the initiative to pursue a regular exchange with the faculties and the Language Center’s Board of Trustees.

## 5 Language policy at ETH Zurich

In the document *ETH Zurich in the Global University Landscape: International Strategy* of 19 November 2008, one finds the following statements that have implications for language policy:<sup>10</sup>

**Objective 1: ETH Zurich will focus on recruiting talented students from Switzerland and around the world, especially at graduate level (master’s, doctoral, continuing education programmes). In this way, it will ensure that Swiss science, business and society have access to an adequate number of specialists. At the same time, quality is the top priority and a good student-tutor ratio is essential.**

1.1 Focus the recruitment of Bachelor’s students on Switzerland and German-speaking countries, with the aim of achieving an appropriate balance between Swiss (4/5) and foreign (1/5) students.

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.global.ethz.ch/docs/strategy>

1.2 Prioritise the recruitment of Master’s students, especially from those institutions and countries with which ETH already has a long-standing partnership. This applies particularly to EU countries, the USA, the countries in which ETH Zurich is the “leading house”, in accordance with the mandate of the State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) (China, Japan, South Korea), and other high-priority countries for the SER (India, Russia, South Africa, Brazil, Chile).

Table 4 shows the percentage of international students in 2009,<sup>11</sup> which mirror ETH Zurich’s implementation of the objective.

**Table 4:** Percentages of foreign students at ETH Zurich

BSc	7,628 students	17.5%
MSc	3,701 students	33.8%
Diploma students	9,087 students	11.9%
PhD	2,258 students	46 %

The objectives below, taken from the same strategy document, are even more directly linked to language issues:<sup>12</sup>

**Objective 2: ETH Zurich will ensure that its graduates have the knowledge and skills to succeed in industry, business, science or the public sector in an increasingly global job market.**

**Measures:**

2.1 Provide support for students: as part of their education, during their studies they should have the opportunity to gain experience at other selected universities, e.g. in the form of exchange programmes, practical courses abroad or research projects at partner universities; appropriate financial and other support should be made available. . . .

11 <http://www.fc.ethz.ch/facts/studierende/studierende>

12 <http://www.global.ethz.ch/docs/strategy>

**Objective 3: ETH Zurich will provide the services that are necessary to ensure the successful integration of foreign students, lecturers and employees.**

**Measures:**

3.4 Improve and if necessary expand the information and support available to international students, lecturers and employees, in order to support their integration in ETH and Switzerland.

3.5 Provide information in German and English, including administrative information, rules and regulations and web applications. . . .

**Objective 4: Support ETH staff in their work as members of an international community and as ambassadors for the university.**

**Measures:**

4.1 Encourage staff mobility, to enable staff to contribute to the process of internationalisation at the university. . . .

4.3 Promote opportunities for exchanges for employees with partner institutions and companies abroad.

4.4 Offer courses to encourage intercultural skills. Employees should learn techniques and methods to help them identify and satisfy the needs of an international clientele.

4.5 Ensure that the resources of the Language Centre are strategically attuned to the needs of employees.

Though objectives 1, 2 and 3 are language-sensitive, language proficiency is not focused on either as an integral part or a prerequisite to reach these objectives. Regarding 4, the Language Center is explicitly mentioned as a partner whose services help the institution to achieve its goals. In practice, it is rather thanks to the Language Center's initiative that its course offers are attuned to staff needs in general. There are, moreover, initiatives by staff in specific units to ask for tailor-made training or coaching which should help them to cope with the challenges of internationalisation. From this perspective, the courses provided by the Language Center offers contribute to the implementation of objective 2 (supporting outgoing mobility through language preparation) and objective 3 (English version of the most important information on the Center's website).

According to the ETH strategy, internationalisation is fostered mainly at master's and doctoral level: among the total number of 39 master's programs offered in 2009, only two are taught in German, nine are taught in German and English as languages of tuition, and the majority (28 programs) are taught exclusively in English. There is a language policy document concerning the languages of instruction at ETH Zurich, the *Directives of the Rector Concerning Languages of*

*Instruction of September 2009, valid from 1 October 2010.*<sup>13</sup> The document states that at bachelor's level the language of instruction should as a rule be German, although from the second year on, tuition in English is possible with the approval of the departments concerned.

Exercises and practical courses may also be offered in the national languages French and Italian. Master's programs should generally be taught in English. There may be programs with instruction in both German and English, and a few taught exclusively in German. The Directives distinguish between main and minor languages of instruction and state that some programs may also be taught in French. Regulations pertaining to study programs must contain all information concerning language requirements and language(s) of instruction. Assessment and examinations are carried out, as a rule, in the language of instruction. Details and restrictions must be defined in the regulations. The Directives reflect a pragmatic, flexible and not primarily normative approach to the question by offering specific solutions which fit the needs of a program or respond to a linguistic challenge in a concrete situation.

At ETH Zurich, the acquisition of credits in compulsory electives of the Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences (D-GESS) is mandatory for all students. Six credits must be acquired during a bachelor's and two during a master's program. In the *Directive of the Rector concerning Compulsory Electives in the Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences (D-GESS)* [*“Weisung der Rektorin zum Pflichtwahlfach aus dem Bereich der Geistes-, Sozial- und Staatswissenschaften”*] of 24 September 2007, the following regulation defines the accreditation of languages:<sup>14</sup>

6. A maximum of 4 ECTS may be acquired in language courses as compulsory electives. The following restrictions must be observed: In the case of the European languages English, French, Italian and Spanish only advanced language courses (starting from level B2) are accepted. Courses in German are accredited only at level C2.

There are additional restrictions defined by the Study Commission of the Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences (D-GESS): Study offers may not be preparatory or introductory in character nor be “skills courses”. With this restriction, the study commission of D-GESS is trying to protect its program

---

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.rektorat.ethz.ch/directives/pdf\\_de/unterrichtssprache.pdf](http://www.rektorat.ethz.ch/directives/pdf_de/unterrichtssprache.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.gess.ethz.ch/studies/pwf/box\\_feeder/2012-08-02\\_Weisung\\_Rektorin\\_PWF\\_EN.pdf](http://www.gess.ethz.ch/studies/pwf/box_feeder/2012-08-02_Weisung_Rektorin_PWF_EN.pdf)

because it does not want to become a pool of courses that other departments do not want to offer within their compulsory program.

Courses designed to provide basic academic or professional skills cannot be accredited for the GESS Compulsory Elective. This means that courses on subjects such as Business English, Presentation Skills, [...] etc., cannot be accredited for the GESS Compulsory Elective.<sup>15</sup>

In practice, this further restriction means that offers in “English for Academic Purposes” cannot be part of the D-GESS program. Several attempts by the Language Center’s director to convince the Study Commission that academic linguistic skills are not the same thing as methodological skills were not successful.

Only five out of 16 Departments offer programs which contain not only compulsory modules and compulsory electives from D-GESS, but also optional modules where language courses are also eligible.

To conclude, ETH Zurich has more language policy regulations than the University of Zurich, which reflects a higher degree of internationalisation. An overall view of the language policy elements in the International Strategy and the Directives of the Rector concerning languages of instruction and compulsory electives in the Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences (D-GESS) show a lack of consistency between strategic goals and the fostering of language competence. The low number of credits for languages within compulsory electives, and the absence of electives where languages may also be credited in most of the bachelor’s and master’s programs, reinforce this situation.

On 8 March 2010, after receiving the results of the analysis of the documents containing language policy elements and the conclusions, the Rector of ETH Zurich stated that there was no need for a language policy document or for the adoption of principles at ETH Zurich level. It was argued that ETH Zurich has admission requirements concerning the languages of tuition, i.e. German and English, and that the departments must monitor their study regulations and admission requirements in accordance with the new directive concerning the language(s) of instruction. The Rector confirmed her support for the position of the Study Commission of the D-GESS. She announced, however, that the departments would be asked to consider the possibility of crediting languages within their disciplinary or optional programs.

From the perspective of governance, the Rector’s position is binding on a macro level, but pragmatic rather than based on strategic decisions in the field of

---

15 [http://www.gess.ethz.ch/studies/pwf/GESS\\_PWF\\_EN.pdf](http://www.gess.ethz.ch/studies/pwf/GESS_PWF_EN.pdf)

languages of instruction. Concerning further policy discussion, the departments will be called upon to review their own language policy guidelines, while the Language Center’s director is invited to maintain exchange with the departments on a regular basis.

## 6 Common language policy approach of the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich

Both Executive Boards share the Language Center’s view that crediting language performance in the programs of both institutions could be more comprehensive. Since study programs are dense at bachelor’s and master’s levels, both Executive Boards have nevertheless declined to make general recommendations to their faculties or departments.

The Language Center’s director is asked to broach the topic of crediting language performance directly with departments and faculties.

## 7 The impact of language policy on program development

In the follow-up to the evaluation of the Language Center, the Language Center’s Board was required to adopt strategic principles of program development. Table 5 shows the scope of the Language Center’s services in 2009.

**Table 5:** The Language Center’s services in 2009

Program for students	6,554 BA, BSc, MSc, MA and mobility students
Program for doctoral students and staff:	1,537 participants
German entry examination:	80 candidates
Tandem learning:	860 partnerships
Self-access center:	1,853 visits

The principles, based on suggestions from the Language Center’s director, which took account of the outcome of the language policy surveys and the positions of both Executive Boards, were adopted on 7 May 2010, as detailed below:

## 7.1 German and English as *linguae francae* of teaching and research

In the case of German as a foreign language, a broad range of pre-semester and semester courses is offered at all proficiency levels, for all skills and for all target groups, with a small increase in course offerings at beginner's level. The program is designed to help students to cope with the linguistic and cultural challenges linked with their studies at the University of Zurich or ETH Zurich. Pre-semester courses therefore fulfill an important multifunctional role and are designed to ensure successful socialisation of students into an international students' community and in the city of Zurich. The semester program contains general language courses, specific skills courses, lectures and exercises and film clubs, along with the courses in German for academic and specific purposes and a Swiss German language course. Language counseling and coaching in the fields of scientific writing and pronunciation are also offered.<sup>16</sup>

English Foundation and Core Skills as well as English for Specific Purposes courses are designed to help students in their studies and in preparing for their future careers. As for English for Academic Purposes modules, a range of offerings is maintained for all target groups in different skills at levels B2 to C2. Academic coaching and tailor-made training ensure a response to specific needs. Moreover, an e-learning platform is being developed with materials in scientific writing. For doctoral students and teaching staff, a broad range of modules in the field of scientific and teaching skills is offered. The module Teaching in English in a Non-English Speaking Environment, for non-native English-speaking teaching assistants, is offered jointly by the Center for University Teaching and Learning and the Language Center. The module aims to raise awareness of the nature and use of English as a *lingua franca* in academic settings, to analyse and practise aspects of rhetorical effectiveness when lecturing in English, to review the implications of teaching students from different cultural backgrounds, and to consider a range of simple didactic instruments designed to facilitate students' learning at the University of Zurich. The format combines practical exercises with individual feedback and theoretical input on the interface between language, pedagogy and culture in higher education.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/angebot/sprachen/liste\\_total.php?sprachnr=4&gruppe=99](http://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/angebot/sprachen/liste_total.php?sprachnr=4&gruppe=99)

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/angebot/sprachen/liste\\_total.php?sprachnr=5&gruppe=99](http://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/angebot/sprachen/liste_total.php?sprachnr=5&gruppe=99)



## 7.2 Modules for mobility

Preparatory courses for the University of Zurich's Entry Examination in German as well as for the examinations in Classical Greek and Latin are offered together with IELTS and TOEFL exam-preparation courses. Moreover, mobility coaching and tools, and workshops for autonomous learning in the self-access center support students in examination preparation, as well as in academic language training. The self-access center also offers students the opportunity to take the Test d'Evaluation du Français (TEF).<sup>18</sup>

## 7.3 Fostering individual plurilingualism

According to the Language Center's slogan, "More languages, more prospects", the fostering of individual plurilingualism is an important goal. Apart from German and English, which cover about 50% of the course program, 12 (10 modern) languages are offered.

In the case of the national languages, diversity of the language offer is an important principle, which implies the necessity of regular needs analysis with departments and faculties and the chairs in the Faculty of Arts. In the French and Italian course program, specific skills and aspects of language (listening, reading, speaking, writing, grammar, vocabulary, etc.) as well as socio-cultural and disciplinary competence are specifically developed alongside elementary language competence. The modular system covering all levels from A1 to C2 allows for flexibility in the course program, which takes account of both the Swiss cultural dialogue and the contemporary needs of international universities and their students. Language counseling helps students to plan their language learning strategically and to choose appropriate courses.

The offer in other European languages (Modern Greek, Polish, Russian and Swedish) is based on curricula that foster all skills, including levels A1–A2 or A1–B1/B2. The offer of non-European languages covers Arabic, Chinese and Japanese at levels A1–B1/B2. The language training in these courses is more intensive at beginner's level, comprising four weekly units of 45 minutes, whereas language courses in other languages are organised in two weekly units. The courses in all these languages encompass thematic features of academic life and build on the strategies of experienced language learners able to cope with steep progression.<sup>19</sup>

---

18 <http://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/mobility/index.php>

19 <http://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/mobility/index.php>

## 8 The impact of language policy on cooperation and quality management

The principles of program development as described above demand a continuous fine-tuning of pedagogical formats and the fostering of a learning and teaching culture based on reflection. Moreover, continuous communication of relevant information on the reform process, decisions by the Language Center's Board or the Executive Boards of the University of Zurich or ETH Zurich by the director and the heads of units is an important part of the Language Center's culture. In the language units, teaching staff are involved in program development through SIGs, projects and workshops. Continuous in-service training and fostering of specialisation facilitate the implementation of ongoing challenges. The Language Center's director also fosters translangual and interdisciplinary cooperation.

The Language Center's quality management system is based on an Organisational Integrated Quality approach which fosters the development of a common learning culture. Apart from established external evaluation such as the evaluation carried out by the Evaluation Office mentioned in this article, a core element of the Language Center's quality management system is "360° feedback", also known as "multisource feedback". This involves employee development feedback that comes from different perspectives concerning the employee. In the Language Center's case, the feedback comes from students, peers, and superiors (heads of units or the Director) as well from stakeholders (the Executive Boards of both universities as well as the deans and heads of departments and program coordinators). 360° feedback is a means of internal self-evaluation and has a formative function only. It appeals to teachers' intrinsic motivation and interest in continuous development. It also fosters trust and cooperation among teachers and between teachers and superiors. Thus, 360° feedback offers a flexible model of constant quality improvement, stressing the individual teacher's responsibility, while integrating forms of social learning in the units.

## 9 Conclusion

This article has endeavored to reflect upon the impact of political decisions on program development and management. It was shown that the lack of a coherent language policy at the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich results in the delegation of some elements of policy negotiation at an intermediate level to the Language Center's director. It has also illustrated the establishment of concrete language policy principles for program development as a way of coping with the

language policy situation, while defending language policy values of the Center's management. Finally, the article has described how the Language Center strives towards teachers' involvement in program development and for a teaching culture of continuous reflection and cooperation.

## References

- British Council/European Commission. 2010–2013. *Language Rich Europe* (EU Nr. 511780-LLP-1-2010-1-UK-KA2-KA2NW). <http://languagerichblog.eu/> (retrieved 26 November 2011).
- Bundesgesetz über die Landessprachen und die Verständigung zwischen den Sprachgemeinschaften (*Sprachengesetz, SpG*) vom 5. Oktober 2007 [Federal Act on National Languages and Understanding between the Linguistic Communities] <http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/ff/2007/6951.pdf>
- CRUS. Bologna-Koordination (eds). 2008/09. *Bologna-Monitoring 2008–2011*. Erster Zwischenbericht. [http://www.unibas.ch/doc/doc\\_download.cfm?uuid=85D747763005C8DEA399722AD356BCC4&&IRACER\\_AUTOLINK&&](http://www.unibas.ch/doc/doc_download.cfm?uuid=85D747763005C8DEA399722AD356BCC4&&IRACER_AUTOLINK&&) (retrieved 13 July 2011).
- Dylan Project. *Language dynamics and management of diversity*. [http://www.dylan-project.org/Dylan\\_en/index.php](http://www.dylan-project.org/Dylan_en/index.php) (retrieved 13 July 2011).
- The GESS Compulsory Elective – Information for ETH students. [http://www.gess.ethz.ch/studies/pwf/GESS\\_PWF\\_EN.pdf](http://www.gess.ethz.ch/studies/pwf/GESS_PWF_EN.pdf) (retrieved 30 November 2012).
- Gâz, Roxana Maria. 2011. Language policies in European Higher Education Area: Babes-Bolyai University – A case study. *Romanian Review of International Studies* 3(1). 51–69.
- Grin, François. 2010. Managing languages in academia: Pointers from education economics and language economics. Paper presented at the conference *Professionalising Multilingualism in Higher Education*, Luxembourg, 4 February, 9–10 (<http://www.unige.ch/traduction-interpretation/recherches/groupe/elf/news/luxembourg-100205/LUX-UNI-TEX-2.pdf>).
- Kommission Internationale Beziehungen und Ressort Internationale Beziehungen. *Leitbild Internationale Beziehungen der Universität Zürich*. Vom Universitätsrat genehmigt im April 2006 [Mission Statement of International Relations of the University of Zurich, authorised by the Executive Board of the University on 2 March 2006]. [http://www.int.uzh.ch/international/mission\\_en.html](http://www.int.uzh.ch/international/mission_en.html) (retrieved 13 July 2011).
- Philippon, Robert: Language Policy and Education in the European Union. In Horbergner, Nancy (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Language and Education, volume 1: Language policy and Political Issues in Education*. Springer (in press)
- Swiss National Science Foundation. Nationales Forschungsprogramm NFP 56. 2005–2009. *Sprachenvielfalt und Sprachkompetenz in der Schweiz* [Language diversity and language competence in Switzerland]. <http://www.nfp56.ch/d.cfm?Slanguage=d> (retrieved 13 July 2011).
- Universitätsrat der Universität Zürich. 2004. *Richtlinien über die Umsetzung des Bologna Prozesses an der Universität Zürich* [Guidelines on the Implementation of the Bologna Process at Zurich University], 1 March. <http://www.sae.uzh.ch/dokumente/ARichtlinieUZH.pdf> (retrieved 13 July 2011).
- Working Group “ETH Zurich International”. 2008. *ETH Zurich in the global university landscape. International strategy*. <http://www.global.ethz.ch/docs/strategy> (retrieved 13 July 2011).

Wunderli-Allenspach, Heidi. 2007. *Weisung der Rektorin zum Pflichtwahlfach aus dem Bereich der Geistes-, Sozial- und Staatswissenschaften* [Directive of the Rector concerning compulsory electives in the Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences (D-GESS)], September 24. [http://www.gess.ethz.ch/studies/pwf/box\\_feeder/2012-08-02\\_Weisung\\_Rektorin\\_PWF\\_EN.pdf](http://www.gess.ethz.ch/studies/pwf/box_feeder/2012-08-02_Weisung_Rektorin_PWF_EN.pdf) (retrieved on July 13 2011).

## Bionote

*Sabina Schaffner* is Director of the University of Zurich and ETH Zurich Language Center.